

## Editorial

The first-ever national conference on higher education in Bhutan, titled *Higher Education Teaching-Learning in Bhutan: Innovations, Adaptations, Opportunities, and Challenges*, was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022 at the campus of Royal Thimphu College (RTC), co-hosted by the RTC, Paro College of Education (PCE), and Samtse College of Education (SCE) in partnership with Department of Adult and Higher Education, Ministry of Education. This special issue of *Rig Tshoel-Research Journal of the Royal Thimphu College* is dedicated to the papers presented at the conference. The conference had 4 keynote speakers, 19 paper presenters, and a panel discussion on '21st Century Bhutanese Graduates'.

The main objectives of the conference were to:

1. Consolidate actual on-the-ground experiences and data on higher education;
2. Provide a platform to share innovations, adaptations, and challenges in higher education in recent years;
3. Create a space for academics to engage in creative thinking on teaching-learning in higher education as a continuous curriculum enhancement and innovation process; and
4. Discuss ways forward for the adoption of innovative and adaptive practices.

Although the conference covered a wide range of topics from teaching-learning, plagiarism, peer observation, PCK, student and faculty research experiences, learner autonomy, online teaching, inclusive education, higher education management and quality assurance, and performance of higher education institutions in Bhutan, only six papers have made it to the final selection through a rigorous double-blind peer review process. Therefore, this special issue contains these six conference papers briefly highlighted below.

First, *A case study of social science and humanities undergraduate research in Bhutan* by Dolma Choden Roder, Kencho Pelzom, Vanlallawmkimi, and Mohan Rai of RTC describes the research experiences of both students and faculty at RTC. It is interesting to note how students' research experiences support them to become more independent learners. This is crucial for Bhutanese undergraduate students as prior research have shown that they lack independent learning skills. The paper also discusses how students can gain a sense of ownership, confidence, and agency through such research experiences. However, it is also reported that it was challenging for both students and faculty in terms of managing their time and workload.

Second, *The degree of learner autonomy among university students* by Chimi Dema and Kezang Yuden, both Associate Lecturers of Gyalposhing College of Information Technology, presents an outcome of the one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study where 'Learning by Doing' pedagogy was implemented in their first-year students (n=62) to promote self-directed learning. Having found this pedagogy useful, these authors suggest educators incorporate this pedagogical tool to enhance learner autonomy among higher education students.

Third, *Attitude towards plagiarism among Sherubtseans* by Chogyal Dorji, Jamyang Chophel, and Tashi Chophel presents discussions on how some of the major factors such as demanding schedules, inadequate reading, language, and writing skills, and economy of effort lead Sherubtse College students to plagiarize their work. Interestingly, they report that both students and lecturers do not take instances of plagiarism seriously. As a result, these authors suggest instilling the concept of integrity and teaching students academic writing and time management skills.

Fourth, *Peer observation as a professional development tool for higher education in Bhutan: An instrumental case study at RTC* by Tshering Lhamo Dukpa, Senior Lecturer at RTC, presents how peer observation and feedback support enhancement of student-centered teaching-learning practices. She argues that peer observation is more effective and favored by higher education educators because of its non-evaluative nature. It benefits both the observed and the observers. Subsequently, suggestions are made to make use of peer observation and feedback as a tool for professional development in higher education settings.

Next, *Qualitative research training in a Bhutanese context: Opportunities and challenges* by Brent Bianchi, former Head Librarian at RTC, reports the outcome of a training (a combination of both virtual and face-to-face sessions) in qualitative research methodology. The training was provided to some selected faculty of the four project partner colleges as a part of the ERASMUS project known as HAPPY—Higher Education Teaching APPROaches for SustainabilITy and Well-Being in Bhutan. The paper presents both opportunities and challenges of doing qualitative research in a Bhutanese context.

The final article on *Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) in higher education in Bhutan: A case study at Royal Thimphu College* by Kencho Pelzom and Kuenga Norbu of Royal Thimphu College explores Lee Shulman's concept of PCK amongst the RTC faculty members through a mixed methods approach. While faculty members rated themselves high on content knowledge, they concluded that students generally did not show an adequate level of self-directed learning skills. The findings also point to how structural issues related to curriculum requirements and rigidity in institutional policies affect quality teaching at the higher education level.

Although the conference saw a variety of papers being presented and discussed, we have included only six in this special issue. We would like to thank all the authors and co-authors of this special issue for their consistent effort in revising and finalizing the manuscripts. We sincerely hope that all will contribute to future conferences and publications.

Happy Reading and Tashi Delek!

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